

Axminster Annual Parish Meeting

2 March 2026

Town Mayor's Report

At the last Annual Parish Meeting on 3 March 2025, we were looking forward to celebrating the 80th anniversaries of VE Day in May and VJ Day in August. Both events were a success, thanks to the sterling efforts of the Royal British Legion and Axminster Heritage Centre.

The Chamber of Commerce's worries about decreasing footfall and cost of living pressures haven't abated. The Council gave financial support for the revised town map in April and to Light Up Axminster at Christmas in support of local businesses.

The Council was pleased to welcome new members Alison Hayward and Joanna Ashkettle last year and more recently Laurence Norman. Kara Burrough stood down in July. We noted with sadness the deaths of former councillors Martin Spurway, Susan Clarke and Robert Jordan. Jack Price was elected Deputy Mayor in May.

Paul Hayward was elected to represent Axminster on Devon County Council on 1 May. This puts him in, we think, the unique position of having a role in all three tiers of local government, as he was already an elected EDDC Councillor and is employed as Axminster's Town Clerk.

The Community Orchard held a well-attended event in spring, and we successfully got a grant of £1400 from the National Lottery Community Fund towards its wildflower meadow in September. Two events were held at Axminster Station in July to support Railway 200 celebrations. It was clear from a meeting at the South Western Railway East Devon Line Stakeholders Forum that the railway makes a significant contribution to the town's wellbeing, which made the disruption of service in the summer and autumn even more unfortunate.

The potential outcome of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) remains unclear. At the end of March an Extraordinary Meeting of the Full Town Council to consider East Devon District Council (EDDC)s Local Plan was attended by 34 members of the public. Following discussions about infrastructure, pollution and the disproportionate allocation of dwellings to Axminster a detailed response was submitted to EDDC. We decided to do no further work on the Neighbourhood Plan until EDDC's local plan had been published, but that has yet to happen. In November EDDC held an LGR event at the Guildhall, but there was little clarity about how it might affect town councils. The greatest likely difficulty is around asset transfer. For example, if EDDC wants Axminster Town Council to assume responsibility for the maintenance of public toilets, how do we pay for them?

On planning matters, the Council isn't a decision-maker but is consulted by EDDC. Normally the applications deal with minor alterations to domestic properties and changes to agricultural buildings. But bigger issues over the year have been proposed Battery Energy Storage Systems, which, following representations from those most nearly affected we have opposed.

We take transparency seriously and were glad to have the Annual Governance and Accountability Return approved and as required to do ran the Public Rights Period for the examination of financial documents in June and July. As in previous years, no councillor

allowances have been claimed. The sale of the Old Courthouse complex is progressing. We accepted an offer on it in November. Unexpected expenditure included repairing vandalism to the town signage at a cost of £5,000. And though we're covered by insurance, the theft of ALL the Council's outdoor equipment from the Cemetery in late October was a major blow.

In September, responding to public concern about the poor condition of some privately owned buildings in the town we wrote to landlords about them. We've also written again to our MP and the leaders of DCC and EDDC about traffic congestion in the town. Although these are matters outside of our control, we can at least draw them to the attention of those who have power to act.

It was a great pleasure, in January, to present the Robin Cross Award to Kay Pike of Plastic Free Axminster. Without her determination the regular community litter picks would undoubtedly not happen. We are grateful for her impact on the town.

I should like to express my thanks to my fellow councillors for their hard work in preparing for and contributing to meetings, to our professional and hard-working staff for all that they do, to the volunteers who keep the town looking at its best and to all those who engage with Axminster Town Council.

Jill Farrow

Axminster Town Mayor

25 February 2026